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Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
Sixty-ninth session

Summary record of the 1585th meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 28 February 2018, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Leinarte

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (*continued*)

Fourth to sixth periodic reports of Suriname (*continued*) (CEDAW/C/SUR/4-6, CEDAW/C/SUR/Q/4-6 and CEDAW/C/SUR/Q/4-6/Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Suriname took places at the Committee table.*

2. **The Chair** said that, at the invitation of the Committee, other members of the delegation would be speaking via video link from Paramaribo.

Articles 7 to 9 (*continued*)

3. **Ms. Malone** (Suriname) said that nationality was recognized under the regime of jus sanguinis and that children were recognized as Surinamese citizens if at least one of their parents was Surinamese. The legislation allowed children born in Suriname before 2014 who did not have citizenship to apply for Surinamese nationality. If such children did not claim the nationality of their parents, they were automatically given Surinamese citizenship. The Medical Mission, which provided extensive coverage throughout the country, worked in cooperation with the Ministry of Home Affairs to ensure that births were registered in the hinterland, and it was the Medical Mission that made declarations with regard to doctors and surgeons.

Articles 10 to 14 (*continued*)

4. **Ms. Reijme** (Suriname) said that there were no special measures in place to encourage women to pursue an education in sectors traditionally dominated by men. However, at the post-secondary level, women outnumbered men in various fields of study where they had previously been in the minority. In the 2016/17 school year, 57 per cent of students enrolled at the Faculty of Technological Sciences were women and 62 per cent of those in the Faculty of Medical Sciences were female. The Vocational Training Institute of the Ministry of Labour encouraged women to study subjects other than manicure and nursery services, but the women themselves often opted for training in traditionally female fields. The Institute was also sometimes asked to provide training by other bodies. For instance, in 2016-2017, women in two villages had been trained in water basin management and had received certification.

5. For girls with disabilities in remote areas, access to education was a subject of concern for the Government, which had recently ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Since December 2017 the Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing had been carrying out awareness-raising programmes at training centres and schools for persons with disabilities. The Ministry was also developing a road map containing specific actions to improve the education system for persons with disabilities within a specific time frame. It would also conduct a survey to establish the number of persons with disabilities in the country and to better identify their needs, thus shaping future policies.

6. Dutch was the language of instruction at all schools, including those in the interior, because giving all children equal opportunities was the priority. Local languages could be used in the first years of schooling, but it was generally considered that continuing instruction in the local language would run the risk of perpetuating discrimination and would be prejudicial to students' progress. The need to ensure competitiveness would require more instruction in foreign languages such as English or Spanish.

7. There were plans to build more schools, but they had been delayed owing to administrative problems. Approximately 20 schools were currently being refurbished or built under the Basic Education Improvement Project. Distance learning pilots were currently being developed, and a decision would soon be taken as to which districts would host them. Information technologies had been used at vocational and secondary schools for some time and their use had recently been extended to certain junior secondary schools as well. In 2016 the Ministry of Education had adopted instructions stipulating that pregnant

students must have access to education services without discrimination and a protocol had been issued for its implementation by all secondary schools. Young mothers had been systematically registered by the Ministry since 1988, either directly or through youth organizations, and they were provided with the tools and skills required to assume their responsibilities as mothers and to prevent second pregnancies. Training programmes were aimed at empowering them and ensuring their economic resilience. Some of the programmes taught them skills such as hairdressing, manicure and pedicure.

8. In 2017 the Ministry had established an interdepartmental committee on community development to provide specific, comprehensive advice on youth policy based on research and up-to-date data. It was hoped that it would thus be able to register girls who had previously failed to register. Late in 2017, it had also established a platform for youth organizations, tasked with encouraging all youth, and specifically young women, to take part in the economic development of their community. The registration of those organizations had already begun. Where no such organizations existed, the programme encouraged local youths to form groups and associations through training and capacity-building. In the field of sport, the Government aimed to address the challenges facing all disadvantaged youths, including girls, through a community-based approach. The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs implemented after-school programmes that encouraged youths to spend leisure time in a responsible manner and to develop life skills through regular sporting activities.

9. **Mr. Eskak** (Suriname) said that the Ministry of Labour had established a commission to prepare a bill on equal pay for work of equal value and that the bill would help to bring the country's labour law into line with the requirements of the conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO). The bill, together with another one addressing conditions of work, was expected to be submitted to the National Assembly in March 2018. A working group had been established to examine the need to revoke discriminatory provisions in the Civil Servants' Act (*Personeelswet*), and the Bureau of Gender Affairs had presented relevant proposals. The main hindrance to implementation of the law on sexual harassment in the workplace consisted of organizational challenges within the Government; the main issues revolved around the capacity and jurisdiction of the labour inspection services. It was considered that the law should be revised or otherwise amended to address those issues. In mid-February 2018, a bill on parental leave upon the birth of a child had been submitted to the parliament; it provided for paternity leave of a maximum of five days.

10. Suriname was currently recovering from a severe economic recession, but the latest census figures, from 2012, indicated that over 4,000 men and some 1,850 women from indigenous tribal groups had been employed at the time. Specialized training was provided to indigenous and tribal peoples in accordance with their needs and competencies, and they received support for entrepreneurship, for example, through cooperatives that assisted them in processing and selling goods. The minimum wage had been in effect since 2014, and a commission had called for the law establishing the minimum wage to be revised. No law could establish a minimum wage in the informal sector; it would be impossible to monitor compliance since such employment was not registered. While both of the recently ratified ILO Conventions had been approved by the National Assembly, enforcement was the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour. He would ask the Ministry to explain any delays in their implementation. A revision of the Civil Code had already been prepared and would be submitted to the National Assembly for approval in the second quarter of 2018.

11. **Ms. Lamsberg-Macnack** (Suriname) said that the Government and the Medical Mission, working with the Pan American Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund, were currently conducting a water sanitation and hygiene project in the upper Marowijne area. The project encompassed community awareness activities, the provision of clean water and the elimination of open defecation through the introduction of latrines. Components of the same project were implemented elsewhere in the hinterland by the Government. As far as she knew, no research had been carried out into the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, or the prevalence of mother-to-child transmission. Everyone in Suriname, regardless of ethnicity, gender, health status or social

background, had access to health services. HIV/AIDS medication and contraceptives were covered by health insurance.

12. **Ms. Gbedemah** said that, when she had raised the issue of local languages, she had not wished to suggest that non-native languages should be totally eliminated from schools. General recommendation No. 36 (2017) emphasized the fact that instruction in non-native and native languages was not mutually exclusive. In the education system it was important to strike the right balance between instruction in native languages, which were useful to engage students and uphold their culture, and non-native languages.

13. The Committee was aware that a law had been adopted to protect the right to education of pregnant girls, but it was concerned that the authorities' efforts to ensure their reintegration fell short. If a girl was studying science, or any other subject, and she dropped out of school owing to pregnancy, why should she be assigned to vocational classes on subjects such as manicure? Why should her education be provided by anyone other than the Ministry of Education?

14. The Committee would like to hear the delegation's views concerning reports of discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersex (LGTBI) learners, gaps in the education system in remote areas and the need for girls to relocate to continue their studies. Had the State party considered raising the age of compulsory education to 16 years old? In the view of the Committee, it was vital to attract the best teachers to rural areas, if necessary with incentives, even if that meant paying substantial bonuses. The Committee would also like to find out about sanitary conditions for girls in the schools that were being refurbished and rebuilt.

15. **Mr. Bergby** said that he would like to know whether the Government had any plans to conduct a survey of remuneration in traditionally male and female occupations, especially in the light of the fact that the State party intended to adopt laws and implement ILO conventions that addressed the question of equal pay for work of equal value. Such a survey would be particularly important in that context. Noting that children were able to start working in most types of employment at the age of 14 years old, he asked whether the new law on harassment would expressly protect children against sexual harassment in the workplace.

16. **Ms. Bethel** said that, although discrimination based on sexual orientation was prohibited under the Criminal Code, LGBTI women still faced discrimination in employment, according to alternative sources. For instance, transgender women had allegedly been prohibited from working as teachers. She invited the delegation to comment on that situation, noting that any such prohibition would violate the right to work enshrined in the Constitution. She would also welcome its comments on reports that LGBTI women faced discrimination in access to health care.

17. **Ms. Reijme** (Suriname) said that Moravian schools had established a project to promote multilingual teaching that had led to better academic performance. Under the programme, which had not yet been implemented nationwide, children were taught in Dutch and a local language.

18. Although schools did not have the right to expel girls who became pregnant, some pregnant girls opted to leave school of their own accord in order to pursue vocational training. The Government would consider ways of offering a wider range of choices to pregnant girls.

19. **Mr. Eskak** (Suriname) said that no special survey had been carried out to measure the extent of the gender wage gap. Children were protected from sexual harassment under criminal and civil law. The bill on the prevention of harassment in the workplace and the bill on equal pay were currently being drafted.

20. **Ms. Malone** (Suriname) said that, despite changes in the law to address discrimination against LGBTI persons, the Government acknowledged that such persons continued to face discrimination and stigmatization. The Ministry of Justice and Police had identified the inequalities that they experienced and had developed a policy to promote their human rights. After the country's last universal periodic review, the Minister of Justice and Police had established a working group tasked with interviewing individuals to gather

information about discrimination directed at LGBTI persons. The interviewees had included representatives of religious organizations, sports organizations, youth groups, government agencies, men's and women's interest groups and private sector organizations. The process was intended to provide an insight into the perspectives of LGBTI persons, determine the level of public awareness of the issues that they faced, and ascertain the gravity of the human rights violations they suffered, the attitudes of civil society towards them and the degree of resistance to their acceptance in society. The results of the interviews had been presented to the National Assembly and follow-up actions stemming from them would be initiated by the Ministry of Justice and Police.

21. The Ministry of Education was unaware of any cases in which LGBTI women had been banned from teaching in schools.

22. **Ms. Acosta Vargas**, noting that social programmes had apparently continued to operate despite the economic downturn of 2016, said that she would welcome information on the social protection programmes currently in place and the amount of money invested in them. She would also like to know whether new emergency programmes had been established to cater for those most affected by the economic downturn; whether rural women were still able to obtain loans through the microcredit fund established in 2010; and whether any evaluation of the credit mechanism's efficacy had been undertaken. It would likewise be interesting to learn whether the tax collection system took into account the difficulties faced by single mothers on low incomes; whether women heads of household were able to obtain benefits for their children without authorization from the children's father being required; and whether married women still needed their husbands' permission to open a bank account.

23. The Committee also wished to know whether agriculture was given priority over mining; whether land grants in implementation of social development policy were concentrated in rural areas; and whether the Directorate for the Sustainable Development of the Indigenous Peoples and the Directorate for the Sustainable Development of Afro-Surinamese Peoples of the Interior/Maroons provided sufficient protection and guidance for women in rural and inland areas. She further enquired what body was responsible for regulating private mining operations; whether the water quality in mining areas was regularly monitored; what measures were taken when mercury was detected in water sources; and to what extent mining companies were held responsible for pollution in rural areas.

24. It would be interesting to learn about any temporary special measures that had been implemented to protect women belonging to the most vulnerable groups, including indigenous, Afro-Surinamese and Maroon women. In particular, she wished to know whether any initiatives had been launched to help women who had previously benefited from conditional cash transfers to enter the labour market and earn a regular wage. More generally, she wondered whether the State party had a vision for the social development of rural women that would respect their right to self-determination and acknowledge the importance of factors such as landownership and access to electricity, drinking water, health care, credit and technology.

25. Noting that the State party had committed itself to respecting the land rights of indigenous peoples, she asked whether the peoples themselves realized that their rights to their ancestral lands were protected; whether tribal and indigenous organizations were represented in the Land Rights Bureau established in 2013; how tensions and legal disputes arising from demands for the protection of lands had been resolved; and whether plans were in place to ratify the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169).

26. She would also like to know whether the State party had an infrastructure in place to receive refugees and asylum seekers; whether standards had been established for their treatment; and whether specific refugee and asylum legislation would be introduced to bring the State party into line with its international obligations. The Committee would likewise be grateful for information on the origins and situation of asylum seekers in Suriname and on the measures currently in place to deal with them.

27. She further enquired as to how many girls and women had been deprived of their liberty; how many were being held in pretrial detention; and whether non-custodial

measures were available for mothers, in accordance with the Bangkok Rules. Lastly, she asked whether unemployed women between the ages of 18 and 59 years had access to health care, and whether support was provided to families whose members included persons with disabilities.

28. **Ms. Reijme** (Suriname) said that the cash transfer programme had been reviewed, and had been replaced by a programme for the promotion of well-being and labour. To date, only a pilot version of the programme had been run; full implementation was being delayed by a lack of necessary software and hardware. Under those parts of the programme that were operational, subsidized food parcels were provided to poor households, and financial aid and subsidized health care were granted to persons with disabilities. Until the launch of the information management system, which would automatically identify families entitled to support, it would remain necessary for families to be registered for the programme. Families in receipt of social benefits were required to ensure that their children attended school and received timely health checks. Measures were in place to identify and offer guidance to any members of beneficiary families who were able to work.

29. **Ms. Acosta Vargas** said that she was still awaiting replies to her questions concerning the microcredit fund, the existence of special tax rates and collection policies for low-income single mothers who were heads of households, and the requirement for women to seek authorization from their husband before applying for family benefits or opening a bank account.

30. **Ms. Malone** (Suriname) said that as a number of issues regarding land rights had not yet been resolved, ratification of ILO Convention No. 169 was still under consideration.

31. **Ms. Reijme** (Suriname) said that the microcredit fund set up in 2010 was still in place. Unemployed women aged 18 to 59 had health coverage as part of the country's national basic health insurance system. A fund had been set up by the Ministry of Trade and Industry to cover insurance premiums for working-age persons who could not afford them. Children and older persons were provided with health insurance by the Government. A dedicated fund was also in place to provide credit to the owners of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises.

32. **Ms. Bethel** said that she would welcome an indication of the action that had been taken in response to three judgments in which the Inter-American Court of Human Rights had found against the State party in cases involving the land rights of indigenous and tribal peoples. She also wondered whether the pending national communication on climate change, the State party's second, would include the gender perspective that had not been included in the first communication, which had been issued in 2005. In that connection, it would be interesting to know how the State party intended to involve women in its efforts to reduce the risk of disaster posed by the effects of climate change.

33. **Ms. Malone** (Suriname) said that Suriname had generally complied with the orders of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights related to the monetary satisfaction to be provided to the petitioners. The orders concerning land rights had not yet been carried out, however, as consultations on the issue, including with the indigenous and tribal peoples concerned, were ongoing. Further information on the efforts made by the Government to comply with the Court's judgments would be provided in writing in due course.

Articles 15 and 16

34. **Ms. Narain** said that she would welcome an indication of the timeline for adoption of the amended Civil Code, which apparently addressed a number of issues of concern to the Committee, including the minimum age for marriage, which was currently 15 for girls and 17 for boys, the obligation for children to take their father's surname, and the granting of parental authority to fathers rather than mothers. She wondered what obstacles were impeding adoption of the amendments, and whether civil society, including organizations of and for women and children in particular, had been consulted as part of the drafting process.

35. She wished to know what measures were being taken to prevent child marriage, whether campaigns had been conducted to warn parents and girls of the dangers of child

marriage; whether there were shelters for victims of child marriage; and whether the State party might consider establishing a mechanism to which victims could submit complaints and from which they could receive appropriate counselling. Similarly, it would be interesting to know what efforts were being made to provide a legal framework for tribal marriages. Lastly, she asked what progress had been made towards the adoption of measures to prohibit the corporal punishment of children in the private and public spheres — a recommendation that had been accepted by Suriname as part of the universal periodic review of 2016 — and whether the provision requiring married women to use their husband's surname on their national identity cards had been repealed as part of the amendments to legislation on personal identification that were to be considered by the National Assembly in March 2018.

36. **Mr. Eskak** (Suriname) said that the revision of the Civil Code, which had been a long and complex undertaking, was complete. The National Assembly was expected to vote on adopting the amended text by the end of the second quarter of 2018. Once the bill on personal identification was made law, married women would be able to use their maiden names in their identity documents. There was no law specifically banning corporal punishment but children were afforded protection from abuse under the country's civil and criminal laws.

37. **Ms. Narain** said that she would appreciate a response to her question regarding the involvement of organizations of and for women and children in the amendment of the Civil Code and to the other issues she had raised. She also wished to know whether the corporal punishment of children was considered a criminal offence. If it was, it would be interesting to know how many persons accused of administering such punishment had been prosecuted in recent years.

38. **Ms. Reijme** (Suriname) said that the National Coordination Centre for Disaster Management made every effort to ensure the effective participation of indigenous and Maroon women in its activities in the interior, including in the coordination of emergency assistance. Women accounted for an increasing number of members of the traditional authorities of the indigenous and Maroon peoples with whom the Centre worked, and men and women participated on an equal footing in the environmental projects overseen by the National Institute for Environment and Development in Suriname. The aim of one of those projects, known as REDD-plus, was to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries. Women were thus participants in the activities undertaken in Suriname to reduce the risk of disasters.

39. **Mr. Eskak** (Suriname) said that answers to the remaining questions would be provided in writing within 48 hours. Noting that the constructive dialogue with the Committee had thrown into sharp relief the challenges still to be addressed by the Government of Suriname in order to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, he assured Committee members that all due consideration would be given to their recommendations.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.